



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Immediate Release

Safeguarding the 50-million-pound annual food production of the largest inshore fishery of the United States--the croaker fishery--is the object of the most recent investigation being undertaken by its biologists, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior.

Field studies under a long-range program of research aimed to maintain the present high production of croakers will begin during the heavy autumn croaker fishery in the Chesapeake Bay. The program will be under the immediate direction of John C. Pearson, formerly in charge of the Service's shad research activities at Charleston, S. C., and under the general supervision of Robert A. Nesbit, in charge of the Middle Atlantic biological staff. Permanent headquarters will be established at the new laboratory of the Fish and Wildlife Service at College Park, Md.

Pearson's investigations will stress a statistical survey of the croaker population to discover the sizes and ages of the fish caught in each locality and by each kind of fishing gear. From this information, biologists are able to learn the maximum poundage that may be taken without endangering future supplies.

Croakers now support one of the six most productive Atlantic Coast fisheries, and are taken in larger quantities than any other species caught in shallow coastal waters. Often called the "hardhead" in the Chesapeake area, it is a small pan fish seldom weighing more than 3 pounds. Retailing at 10 cents a pound or less, it is a cheap and palatable seafood valued by thousands of consumers.

In the Chesapeake Bay region the croaker is the No. 1 food fish both in pounds produced and in value to the fishermen, who consider it their chief "staple." The bulk of the catch is taken within Chesapeake Bay and Pamlico Sound in depths seldom exceeding 20 feet. During the winter, when these fish leave the bay and migrate into deeper ocean waters, they are taken by trawlers operating off the Virginia Capes.